

# ID card designed for Alabama drivers, non-drivers on autism spectrum

**Ebony Davis**

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Shaela Barnes remembers some of the happier moments so far with her 16-year-old son, Jaxston, such as walking with him down the football field when he was selected as homecoming king and watching him on his best behavior at his eighth-grade graduation.

Scariest times happened when Jaxston was younger and would attempt to run away, or when he would be oblivious to his surroundings and walk away from her in a crowded store.

If the latter instances happen again, Barnes said she is hopeful Jaxston, who is diagnosed with autism, might benefit from a new Autism Spectrum Disorder Identification Card developed in Alabama. Officials said the bright yellow card can be carried along with a driver's license or other ID card in order to help first responders better identify autistic behaviors that might appear noncompliant.

The autism ID card is available to all residents in Alabama who have a diagnosis that falls within the autism disorder spectrum. Residents can apply for the card through their local health department. The application requires verification from a healthcare provider and a government-issued ID.

The autism ID card costs \$10.

According to Jamey Durham, director of the Alabama Bureau of Professional and Support Services, the autism ID card does not have a photograph because it was initially designed as a supplement to a driver's license for drivers who were diagnosed on the autism spectrum.

Durham said state legislation prompted the autism ID card's creation.

According to Bama Hager, program director for the Autism Society of Alabama, Alabama's autism ID card is the first of its kind in the nation. Hager said the card came about after a group of parents in the Decatur area advocated for an autism designation on Alabama's driver's license for teen and adult



**Autism Spectrum Disorder card**

**DANNY TINDELL / DOTHAN EAGLE**

Cory Kirkland with the Alabama Department of Public Health displays the State's Autism Spectrum Disorder card at the Houston County Health Department Tuesday afternoon.

drivers who were on the autism spectrum.

Hager said legislation that allows the autism ID cards instead of the driver's license designation allows far more autistic residents access to the card in case of emergency situations that could require law enforcement interaction. She said examples of those cases would be when a child or adult with autism is somehow disconnected from his or her caretaker, or when an autistic person goes through an airline security screening.

An estimated 40,000 Alabamians are diagnosed with autism, she said.

"If someone with autism becomes overly anxious or distressed, then they will have a communication challenge," she said.

"They may appear under the influence, noncompliant or oppositional when in reality it's not their intent. It's their symptoms being interpreted incorrectly."

Dothan Police Capt. Stacy Robinson said documenting autism on a driver's license record may have been more beneficial for law enforcement, but that any form of identification that could assist first responders in routine encounters or medical emergencies could prove helpful.

"Obviously in a fast paced emergency situation you may or may not get to the point of seeing someone's ID card, but having the ID card will definitely help in any type medical emergency or situations where you'd need to contact a caretaker or doctor," he said.

Robinson said Dothan police officers recently had a mental health training session relating to autism. He said the course was taught by a law enforcement officer who has a child who was diagnosed with autism, which gave the officers firsthand exposure to situations they might encounter with autism in their duties.

While Barnes said she doesn't anticipate her son being able to drive, she said she thinks the card can still assist her son.

"People look at him and think that everything is normal, but they might wonder why he talks or acts a certain way," Barnes said.

"Maybe something that he can use if there was a situation where his behavior was misinterpreted will help not only him but the people around him who might not know how to deal with what's going on."

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**Autism Spectrum Disorder Identification Card**

Reason:

-Designed for registered drivers with a diagnosis that falls within the autism disorder spectrum

-Also available to non-drivers with similar diagnosis

Requirements:

-Completed registration form, either printed online at [adph.org/disability](http://adph.org/disability) or picked up at a local health department

-Form requires authorization from healthcare provider

-Government-issued identification required at time of application

Cost: \$10